1: Hart & Pilling E-5 (1928-1954) 1960
OI20 Tiwi OI20

(Australian aborigines from the mainland) they were not Tiwi and hence not real people, or at least not human enough to share the islands with the chosen people who owned them.

Thus, the word "Tiwi" did not mean "people" in the sense of all human beings, but rather "we, the only people," or the chosen people who live on and own the islands, as distinct from any other alleged human beings who might show up from time to time on the beaches. This exclusion of outsiders from real "us-ness" and hence from real "human-ness" was continued when the Europeans began to arrive in the early nineteenth century, and certainly as late as 1930 the Tiwi continued to call and think of themselves as Tiwi, *the* people, and to use other words for all non-Tiwi, whether they were mainland aborigines, Malay fishermen, Japanese pearl-divers, French priests, or British officials, who penetrated into their exclusive little cosmos.

Their firm tradition that the twenty-five miles of ocean were adequate to isolate them from the mainland is confirmed by certain objective distributional evidence. Several characteristic features of mainland native technology were absent on Melville and Bathurst Islands, notably the spear thrower and the curved (or return) boomerang. To anthropologists, the idea of an Australian tribe lacking spear throwers and curved boomerangs is almost a contradiction in terms, and the only feasible explanation is isolation and hence failure of these mainland traits to diffuse to the islands.[1]

That no culture stands absolutely still in its technology no matter how isolated it may be is suggested by the fact that the Tiwi, while lacking the spear thrower and curved boomerang of the mainland, elaborated their wooden spears to a complexity of design and a degree of decoration unknown on the mainland, and also developed a much greater assortment of straight throwing sticks, made of hardwood, than any mainland tribe. Moreover, their carved and elaborately painted grave posts are unique among Australian tribes, and point up both the Tiwi isolation from the mainland and the favorable food situation which permitted the leisure time necessary to manufacture the elaborate posts as well as the elaborate ceremonial spears. In the nontechnological aspects of their culture we find in many respects the same absence of mainland traits and the same elaboration of traits that were distinctively or even uniquely Tiwi. Male initiation ceremonies on the mainland focus upon circumcision or subincision or both; neither custom was practiced by the Tiwi, who instead included in their initiation ritual the forcible plucking out of the pubic hair of the novice. The degree of plural marriages achieved under their marriage rules was far greater than anything reported for the mainland; the absolute prohibition of any female, regardless of age, being without a husband was unknown elsewhere in Australia; certain features of the kinship system fail to conform to any of the mainland norms, and so on. Wherever we look in their culture we get the strong impression of an Aus-

[1] A toy spear thrower, played with by children, was in use, but this may be the result of post-white contact. Its native name—*pani*—seems most un-Tiwi, and a likely guess is that it was introduced by Cooper's mainlanders, being accepted as a toy for children but scorned as childish by the adult men.

5: Basedow D-5 (1911)1913 O120 Tiwi O120

411 the mainland. In the first place no spears are manufactured for projecting by other method than simply by hand. No spear-throwers, so much in evidence [101] among all true Australian tribes, are in use on these islands. Yet light spears were observed which really marked the beginning of the development of the arrow. 411 524 These were seen to be used by youths at play and during their sham fights. Light green sticks, a little over a metre in length and slightly more than a lead pencil's thickness, are cut and scraped to a simple point at one end. The opposite end, that is, the back- or hand-end, is next put to the mouth and split with the teeth along its fibres into several stripe some 10 centimetres long. The split pieces are then bent outwards like the feathers of an arrow and the toy weapon is ready for use. It can be hurled by hand with astounding precision. The opponents evade the missiles by dodging and crouching and contorting their bodies in much the same clever manner as I have described[1] of the Larrekiya and Wogait tribes.

411 Strictly speaking, one type of spear prevails. It is made of a single piece of solid wood, straightened to a greater or less degree over a fire. It is barbed at the front end and tapers to a simple point behind. The extreme variations in length and, consequently, in weight also, of this spear attract the attention at first sight. It is nothing unusual to find spears measuring 450 centimetres in length and weighing 2,700 grammes, but at the same time the smaller specimens measure only 250 centimetres in length and weigh 370 grammes. When we consider that a fair average length of the Northern Territory spear is 300 centimetres and a good average weight 260 grammes, the maxima of the islanders' spears quoted seem very remarkable indeed. The more do these appeal to us since the largest species [136] of the indigenous fauna is but a fair-sized wallaby. Crocodiles are comparatively scarce, and the buffalo, introduced from Timor by Captain Barlow, first commandant of Fort Dundas, in 1826, is practically unknown on Bathurst Island. On Melville Island, where similar spears are in use, the buffalo is very plentiful, but it is a singular fact that the natives do not hunt this beast to any considerable extent.

The head of the spear has many barbs carved on one side and, occasionally, on two diametrically opposite sides. There are usually from ten to thirty barbs, which are directed backwards (*vide* Plate IX, Fig. 5 (Series)). Behind these there may or may not be from four to eight small serrations that stand out at right angles to the length of the shaft. In other cases, too, some six or more barbs are cut at the back part of the spear-head pointing the opposite way, that is, in the direction the spear is thrown. The spear heads have a long point resembling a cutting-blade or spike. The barbs are symmetrically carved with sharp edges and point. They are flattish lancet-shaped, with a central ridge on the outside, and project from the head to various degrees of prominence in different specimens. Many of the spears are longitudinally grooved with an adze, either for the whole of their length or along the head-end only. They are occasionally coloured and decorated with ochre, some

[1] *Trans. Roy. Soc. S. Australia*, vol. xxxi, 1907, p. 33.

5: Basedow D-5 (1911)1913 OI20 Tiwi OI20

corrobboree of the Melville Islanders, but it appears that he regarded the demonstration as hostile. He writes that "the dance consisted chiefly of the performers leaping two or three times successively out of the sea, and then violently moving their legs so as to agitate the water into a foam for some distance around them, all the time shouting loudly and laughing immoderately; then they would run through the water for eight or ten yards and perform again; and this was repeated over and over as long as the dance lasted."

During none of these ceremonies, or indeed anywhere on the island, did I see anything of totemism in the scientific sense of the word. This fact is in accordance with my observations in Central and North Australia, and my negative evidence is amply borne out by the researches of Drs. W. E. Roth and H. Klaatsch and others.

Pastimes.

The sham-fights of youths with small arrow-shaped spears have already been mentioned. Children were observed upon the beach competing in running and long jump. A favourite amusement of the younger folk on a breezy day is to collect the light globular seed-heads of the "spring rolling grass" (*Spinifex hirsutis*), that grow on every sand-hill near the coast, and take them to the beach and there release them on the hardened sand. Driven along by the wind, these seeds travel over the surface at no mean pace. Allowing them to gain a fair start, the children bolt after them and endeavour to overtake them and pick them up from the ground while dashing past them at full speed in "cow-boy" fashion.

Another game is that of hand-ball. The seeds of the zamia (*Cycas media*) take the place of a small ball. Two lads stand facing one another and hit the seed to and fro with the palms of their hands, after the style of a modern game of tennis.

Despite their keenness of sight and quickness of hand, they are, nevertheless, very backward in catching with their hands an object which is thrown at them.

Burial Method.

The aborigines of Bathurst and Melville Islands have a unique and elaborate method of burial; graves have been found on both islands. It appears that the favourite places for burying the dead are there, where a jungle or mangrove-thicket breaks to the ordinary eucalypt-woodland, usually near to the sea-coast or to a native water.

Historically we have to note several observations in this connection.

Sir Gordon Bremer[1] mentions having discovered a grave on Bathurst Island in 1824. "The situation was one of such perfect retirement and repose that it

[1] *Imperial Parliamentary Paper*, ordered by the House of Commons to be printed, London, March 27th, 1843; also in *The Genesis of Queensland*, by H. S. Russell, Sydney, 1888, p. 34.